



## The Power House

*John Buchan*

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## **The Power House** John Buchan

When his friend Charles Pitt-Heron vanishes mysteriously, Sir Edward Leithen is at first only mildly concerned. But a series of strange events that follow Pitt-Heron's disappearance convinces Leithen that he is dealing with a sinister secret society. Their codename is 'The Power-House'. The authorities are unable to act without evidence. As he gets deeper involved with the underworld, Leithen finds himself facing the enemy alone and in terrible danger.

## **The Power House Details**

Date : Published June 30th 2001 by House of Stratus (first published 1916)

ISBN : 9781842327845

Author : John Buchan

Format : Paperback 112 pages

Genre : Mystery, Fiction, Classics, Adventure, Thriller, Novels

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## From Reader Review The Power House for online ebook

### Marts (Thinker) says

A good yet rather short suspense and adventure tale from Buchan...

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### Eleanor says

Reminiscent of Hitchcock: The Power House of the title is definitely a McGuffin as it really isn't at all clear what evil deeds its members are cooking up. But it's a good chase story.

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### Cathy says

Find all my book reviews, plus fascinating author interviews, exclusive guest posts and book extracts, on my blog: <https://whatcathyreadnext.wordpress.com/>

Our narrator is Sir Edward Leithen, in his first appearance in a Buchan adventure. A barrister and Member of Parliament, he describes himself as 'a placid, sedentary soul'. In fact, his friend Tommy Deloraine observes acutely, 'Life goes roaring by and you only hear the echo in your stuffy rooms.' This all changes when, by a series of seemingly unconnected events, Leithen is drawn into investigating the unexplained disappearance of Charles Pitt-Heron. Like Leithen, the reader's interest has by now been aroused: '...for every man at the bottom of his heart believes that he is a born detective.'

In his dedication to *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, Buchan said that his aim was to write 'romance where the incidents defy the probabilities, and march just inside the borders of the possible.' Well, it has to be said that the author pushes to the limits the boundaries of the possible in *The Power-House*. As Leithen himself admits, 'I had collected by accident a few odd, disjointed pieces of information, and here by the most amazing accident of all was the connecting link.'

That link resides in the person of a man, Mr Andrew Lumley. Lumley is an example of one of the characteristic features of a Buchan "shocker" (his term for his adventure stories); the concept of an immense intellect unconstrained by common notions of morality. Similar, if you like, to Professor Moriarty in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* stories. Furthermore, the idea of an underground global organisation, subtly wielding the levers of power for malevolent ends but whose members possesses a cloak of respectability.

As events progress, Leithen comes to realise the perceived safety of the London he knows so well is a mere facade. Not only is he being watched but his watchers likely have more sinister objectives. In some of the most brilliant scenes in the book, Buchan describes how Leithen comes close to falling into the hands of the secret organisation known as the Power House even as he walks the crowded streets of the city. He observes, 'Now I saw how thin is the protection of civilisation.' The fragility of civilisation is another frequent theme of Buchan's adventure stories. As Lumley warns Leithen: "You think that a wall as solid as the earth separates civilisation from barbarism. I tell you the division is a thread, a sheet of glass."

The Power-House is an entertaining story that features many of the elements that would reappear a few years later in Buchan's most well-known and successful book, *The Thirty-Nine Steps*. A relatively short book, *The Power-House* is an easy read thanks to Buchan's effortless prose. It should probably be considered a rehearsal, a first attempt, to master the style of the type of adventure story that would later make his name.

Andrew says

Reading this book from John Buchan I thought to myself when a book evokes such a strong sense of dej-  
rious am I reading just a new version of an old story or in fact I am reading one of those rare books which sets  
the ground work for a more famous descendent.

Let me explain - I have been fan of 39 steps and particular the character of Richard Hannay (as well as his subsequent adventures) and reading this the first instalment in the Sir Edward Leithen series (honestly I didnt realise it at the time of reading it) I felt that so many similarities that it almost as if I was reading a prequel or some precursor.

However the truth (and of course this is my own opinion and could be totally off course) is far more intriguing. Reading the introduction to this edition it appears that Buchan liked to base his characters on friends and people he knew. Could it be this style of profiling his characters meant that even though his works may not be connected they were in fact by the world he created and the people he populated it with.

Either way the result was a book that even though portrays a world that no longer exists still was easy to envisage and believe.

The result was a cat and mouse game across London that for me was just as thrilling as many of its contemporary stories from today. The question is now I realise its the first in a series - where are the rest of them and what will I think once I have read them.

**James Hold says**

A short but effective novel. By all rights it shouldn't work but it does. That's Buchan's skill showing thru. There's nothing specific about the set-up. There's a bad guy, Lumley, with a plan to take over...what? I'm not sure. Either I didn't catch it or it wasn't spelled out. The same goes for 'how' he intends to do it. All we know is a friend of a friend of Leithen flees the country to get away from Lumley, so the friend, Tommy, goes after him while Leithen stays behind and ferrets out Lumley as the bad guy. There's very little action until the last two chapters. It's mostly narrative to that point. It does have an effective ending where it shows the public being kept in ignorance of what's going on--essentially that *really* bad people don't get outed but the people in charge instead make out like they weren't so bad after all. (If that sounds a lot like American politics, then you're right.) Again, a good book that can be read in a few hours.

## Ahmed Gamal Shafik says

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### **Ramy says**

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### **Kelvin says**

John Buchan's claim to fame is of course the Thirty Nine Steps. This book is similar in the sense it is about an ordinary person put into a situation where he is the only person who can save the world. It is, however, not as well written as the 39 Steps. It is a short book but it is long winded and there is not much action until the very end.

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### **Jayaprakash Satyamurthy says**

Edward Leithen is a very different character from Richard Hannay: he's well settled in his urban life as a lawyer and MP, doesn't crave travel and isn't an adventurer. However, like Hannay, he has a knack for finding himself in the midst of perilous conspiracies, and he rises to the occasion in his own way.

The villain of the piece is a type Buchan returned to every now and then: the highly intelligent, civilised man

who seeks to bring down the world order. The gradual accretion of clues in the first part of the novel is gripping, but things really heat up once open aggression breaks out between Leithen and the 'power house'. Great pacing, a taut, compelling plot and the usual atmosphere of upper-crust drawing rooms and clubs that is never very far away in Buchan's adventure novels. Cunningly, an adventure novel where the stereotypical action takes place entirely offstage, while the real story unfolds in prosaic London.

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### **Tony says**

THE POWER HOUSE. (1913). John Buchan. \*\*.

When you mention the name John Buchan, most readers will give you a blank stare. He was a prodigious writer from Scotland who wrote over thirty novels and sixty non-fiction books. If you begin reading off a list of his books, you will continue to get a stare until you mention, "The Thirty-Nine Steps," his big hit, written in 1915, and later adapted for a film directed by Alfred Hitchcock. This novel, "The Power House," was written just after his hit novel, and is an extremely short one. It is kind of an espionage novel, and features his new hero, Sir Edward Leithen. Leithen was an attorney in London, and somehow got involved in some inane political plot involving one of his friends. He jumps in to help, though we never really discover what the plot really is. There were a total of four Leithen stories written, and they all sold reasonably well. As you might have guessed, however, they are not barn-burners today. The writing is complicated, and takes a great deal of attention to understand what the author is trying to say. Although Leithen is not a traveler – he loves his London life – we are still exposed to a long string of locations apparently on the fringes of Afghanistan and India, where his friend moves to. Leithen is one of those people who cannot avoid getting himself involved in any underhanded deal that is going around – especially if one of his friends is involved to his detriment. Short as it is, I still struggled to get through this novel. I'm not really up for reading about any more of Leithen's adventures.

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### **Leslie says**

Perhaps only 3½\* for this fairly short adventure novel about a man who discovers a secret anarchist society in pre-WW1 London.

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### **???? ??? ?????? says**

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### **Susan Jo Grassi says**

This short terrorist thriller was written in 1916 by John Buchan of The Thirty-Nine Steps fame and is, in my opinion, worth a read. The action is a little dated compared to today's standards but it is still a great novella, with fascinating, strong characters pitting good against evil.

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### **Ahmed Younis says**

Simple mystery with action mixed in one novel makes you feel like a child wrote the novel plus numerous places can make you get confused

His experience in the First World War was so useful in this novel and the 39 steps

He should be named Sir Arthur Conan Doyle the second for this :D

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### **Toastkat says**

There's something to be said about vintage literature: it makes for fascinating study. Someone knowledgeable in history, social studies, or politics would find vintage literature an easy window to view our past from and compare the worlds of yesterday to the universe of now. As for readers like me, who have little or fragmented knowledge of the aforementioned topics, there is still the benefit of the effortless time machine that is the printed word. Lately I've developed a fascination with antique books, oohing and aahing over anything over 75 years old that comes into the library I work for (we just acquired a book printed in 1913, and I was afraid to breathe on it), and I've found that I learn more about history through reading vintage literature. The Power House is written by the same author as The Thirty-Nine Steps, and is also written in the same "this could have really happened" fashion. Granted, if I knew more about history, I wouldn't be as gullible, but the story is written in such a way that it made me question if I was reading a fiction or eye-witness account of a real adventure. The elements of a modern-day spy thriller adventure stories are present, and this book feels very much like the template/formula modern day writers reference. There is also a moment of social commentary that was rather jarring, as it foreshadowed not the story itself but the world we live in now. It made me stop and wonder if these written time machines, these books from the past we read today, are windows that can be viewed from both sides.

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